



NOAA FISHERIES

Atlantic Highly Migratory Species

Atlantic Bluefin Tuna General Category Fishery: NMFS Transfers 40 mt from Reserve Category for Remainder of 2012 and Adjusts General Category Daily Retention Limit for January 2013

December 12, 2012

Actions being taken and important dates

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) adjusts the General category Atlantic bluefin tuna (BFT) quota by transferring 40 mt from the Reserve category. With this transfer, the adjusted General category quota for the 2012 fishing year, which ends December 31, 2012, is now 475.1 mt.

NMFS is also taking action to adjust the General category BFT daily retention limit for the January subquota to **two** large medium or giant BFT (measuring 73" or greater) per vessel per day/trip. Although it is called the "January subquota," the regulations allow the General category fishery under this quota to continue until the 23.1-mt subquota is reached, or March 31, whichever comes first. Hence, this retention limit adjustment is *effective January 1 through March 31, 2013*, or until the January subquota is reached, *whichever comes first*. NMFS takes this action after consideration of the regulatory determination criteria at § 635.27(a)(8) regarding inseason adjustments.

Through December 31, 2012, the current retention limit of three large medium or giant BFT per vessel per day/trip remains in effect.

Who is affected?

Both of these actions affect only the commercial General category BFT fishery. These actions are intended to provide opportunities to harvest the available U.S. BFT quota without exceeding it and preserving the opportunity for General category fishermen to participate in the winter BFT fishery in the mid-Atlantic region that typically begins in December when commercial-sized BFT become available in that area. Although NMFS has the authority to set the daily retention limit higher than two BFT, under a higher limit (and higher fish availability), the rate of harvest of the January subquota could be accelerated and result in a relatively short fishing season. For more information on BFT fishing regulations, including recreational size and retention limits, please go to <http://hmspermits.noaa.gov>.

NMFS will continue to monitor the fishery closely through dealer reports. Depending on fishing effort and catch rates, NMFS may determine that additional retention limit adjustments or fishery closure are necessary to ensure available quota is not exceeded or to enhance scientific data collection from, and fishing opportunities in, all geographic areas.

The General category daily retention limit applies to vessels permitted in the commercial Atlantic tunas General category and the Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Charter/Headboat category while fishing commercially. These limits are effective for all areas except for the Gulf of Mexico, which are designated spawning grounds for bluefin tuna and where NMFS does not allow targeted fishing. Regardless of the duration of a fishing trip, the daily retention limit applies upon landing. For example (and specific to the January 2013 limit), whether a vessel

fishing under the General category limit takes a two-day trip or makes two trips in one day, the daily limit of two fish may not be exceeded upon landing.

NMFS regulations at 50 CFR 635.21(a)(1) require that all BFT that are released be handled in a manner that will maximize survivability, and without removing the fish from the water. For additional information on safe handling, see the Careful Catch and Release brochure available at <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/hms/>.

This notice is a courtesy to BFT fishery permit holders to help keep you informed about the fishery. For additional information, call (888) 872-8862 or (978) 281-9260, or go to <http://hmspermits.noaa.gov>. Official notice of Federal fishery actions is made through filing such notice with the Office of the Federal Register.

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